



Lt. Col. Dave Grossman

"Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill" & "The Bulletproof Mind"

Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill

What is the root cause of this epidemic of violence in our society? The thing we have to ask ourselves is not, "Where did the guns come from?" The question we need to ask is, "What makes today's children bring those guns to school when their parents did not?" According to the head of the American Psychiatric Association Task Force on Juvenile Violence, "Children don't naturally kill: they learn it from violence in the home, and most pervasively, from violence as entertainment in television, movies, and interactive video games." We are taking the safety catch off of a nation, just as surely as we would take a safety catch off of a gun.

Violence is rising in many nations with draconian gun laws. And though we should never downplay child abuse, poverty, or racism, there is only one new variable present in each of these countries, bearing the exact same fruit: media violence presented as entertainment for children.

There is significant proof that society is aping military conditioning, but without the vital safeguard of "discipline." Something very similar to this desensitization toward violence is happening to our children through violence in the media—but instead of 18-year-olds, it begins at the age of 18 months when a child is first able to discern what is happening on television.

To understand the "why" behind Jonesboro, Springfield, Pearl and Paducah, and all the other outbreaks of this "virus of violence," we need to understand first the magnitude of the problem. The per capita murder rate doubled in this country between

1957, when the FBI started keeping track of the data, and 1992. A fuller picture of the problem, however, is indicated by the rate people are attempting to kill one another—the aggravated assault rate. That rate in America has gone from around 60 per 100,000 in 1957, to over 440 per 100,000 by the middle of the 1990s. As bad as this is, it would be much worse if not for two major factors.



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First is the increase in the imprisonment rate of violent offenders. The prison population in America nearly quadrupled between 1975 and 1992. According to criminologist John J. DiIulio, "dozens of credible empiri-

cal analyses...leave no doubt that the increased use of prisons averted millions of serious crimes." If it were not for our tremendous imprisonment rate (the highest of any industrialized nation), the aggravated assault rate and the murder rate would undoubtedly be even higher.

The second factor keeping the murder rate from being any worse is medical technology. According to the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps, a wound that would have killed nine out of ten soldiers in World War II, nine out of ten could have survived in Vietnam. Thus, by a very conservative estimate, if we had 1930s-level medical technology today, the murder rate would be ten times higher than it is. The magnitude of the problem has been held down by the development of sophisticated lifesaving skills and techniques, such as helicopter medivacs, 911 operators, paramedics, CPR, trauma centers, and medicines.

In every nation, region, or city, when television is introduced, there is an immediate explosion of violence on the playground, and within 15 years there is a doubling of the murder rate. Why 15 years? That is how long it takes for the brutalization of a three-to five-year-old to reach the "prime crime age." That is how long it takes for you to reap what you have sown when you brutalize and desensitize a three-year-old.

When young children see somebody shot, stabbed, raped, brutalized, degraded, or murdered on TV, to them it is as though it were actually happening. To have a child of three, four, or five watch a "splatter" movie, learn-

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ing to relate to a character for the first 90 minutes and then in the last 30 minutes watch helplessly as that new friend is hunted and brutally murdered is the moral and psychological equivalent of introducing your child to a friend, letting her play with that friend, and then butchering that friend in front of your child's eyes. And this happens to our children hundreds upon hundreds of times.

Sure, they are told: "Hey, it's all for fun. Look, this isn't real, it's just TV." And they nod their little heads and say, "okay." But they can't tell the difference. Can you remember a point in your life or in your children's lives when dreams, reality, and television were all jumbled together? That's what it is like at that level of psychological development. That's what the media is doing to them.

The Japanese were masters at using "classical" conditioning with their soldiers. Early in World War II, Chinese prisoners were placed in a ditch on their knees with their hands bound behind them. And one by one, a select few Japanese soldiers would go into the ditch and bayonet "their" prisoner to death. This is a horrific way to kill another human being. Up on the bank, countless other young soldiers would cheer them on in their violence. Comparatively few soldiers actually killed in these situations, but by making the others watch and cheer, the Japanese were able to use these kinds of atrocities to classically condition a very large audience to associate pleasure with human death and suffering.

[Similarly] constant exposure to screen violence can profoundly affect both children and adults in two important ways: we can come to need a daily dose of violent media, and we can build an immunity to violent imagery, becoming incapable of producing socially acceptable emotional responses. As our kids desire increased levels of violence and become more and more desensitized, they are constantly learning that harming is fun, "natural," and the "right" thing to do. We are reaching that level of desensitization at which the inflicting of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment: vicarious pleasure rather than revulsion. We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it.

The military has also used "operant" conditioning to substantially raise the firing rate. Soldiers learn to fire using "simulators." That is the stimulus. The trainees have only a split second to engage the target. The conditioned response is to shoot the target, and then it drops. Stimulus-response, stimulus-response, stimulus-response: soldiers experience hundreds of repetitions. Later, when soldiers are on the battlefield, they will shoot reflexively and shoot to kill. Now these simulators are in our homes and arcades—in the form of violent video games.

Michael Carneal, the fourteen-year-old boy who walked into Paducah school and opened fire on a prayer group meeting that was breaking up, never moved his feet during his rampage. He never fired far to the right or left, never far up or down. He simply fired once at everything that popped up on his "screen." It is not natural to fire once at each target. The normal, almost universal, response is to fire at a target until it drops and then move on to the next target. But most video games teach you to fire at each target only once, to rack up a high score, and many give bonus points for head shots. It's awful to note that of Michael Carneal's eight shots he had eight hits, all head and upper torso, three dead and one paralyzed. And this from a kid who, prior to stealing that gun, had never shot a "real" handgun in his life!

The Bulletproof Mind

The FBI says that the average experienced law enforcement officer, in the average shootout, at an average range of seven yards, hits with approximately two bullets in five. I tell law enforcement officers about Michael Carneal's hit rate when I train them, and they are stunned. The video game industry boasts about the quality of their products; the military and police are wondering why on earth such technology is on the street. Military and law enforcement use the same technology. But in law enforcement, and now in the military, the right option is often not to shoot, and police must beware of infringing on civil liberties. As children and youth are playing these games for ten



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or more hours a week, they are not solving and negotiating conflicts, and they are not gaining needed cooperative learning and social skills.

All of us have had to face hostile aggression: On the playground as children, in the impoliteness of strangers, in the malicious gossip and comments of acquaintances, and in the animosity of peers and superiors in the workplace. In all of these instances everyone has known hostility and the stress it can cause. Most people avoid such confrontations at all costs. But with police officers, it is their job to seek-out and deal with confrontation! Facing aggression and hatred in our fellow citizens is an experience of an entirely different magnitude. Police need to be psychologically prepared and equipped, that is why I call my program the "Bulletproof Mind."

Stress inoculation—if I want to inoculate you against a disease, I give you a little dose of that disease and your body will build up a resistance, and when the real disease comes by it will not kill you. If I want to inoculate you against a stressor, I have to give you a dose of that stress—but it has to be precise! Last year's flu vaccine doesn't cut it this year. Beating the living daylight out of you doesn't qualify as stress inoculation. This business of stress inoculation,

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we always tried to do it, we just haven't had very good tools.

Self-Discipline—one effective means of inoculating a trainee against the Winds of Hate can be seen in U.S. Army and USMC pugil-stick training. I taught at West Point for three years—every freshman, for over a century, has had to take boxing for a semester. Before they go any further, before we spend another nickel on them, they've got to demonstrate the ability to take a blow and give a blow. When in the face of all this manufactured contempt and overt physical hostility the recruit overcomes the situation, with honor and pride, he realizes at both conscious and unconscious levels that he can overcome such overt interpersonal hostility. He has become partially inoculated against hate. But keep in mind the Japanese example given earlier—in this training the inoculation was specifically oriented toward hate. Military training can be manipulated toward hate, or if properly done, against it.

Now, boxing is a useful tool, but it has some limitations. The worse case stressor in police work is somebody shooting at you, and you have to be able to respond, responsibly and accurately. So, for example, what we want to do is put boxing gloves on bullets, as in simunitions training. We have research where heart beat monitors were placed on police officers engaged in simunitions training. The researchers have found sustained heart rates above 200 beats per minute, and some researchers have reported heart rate spikes of up to 300 beats! We are dealing with a phobic scale response here, and we're just talking about training, not life and death.

The first couple of times people do simunitions their heartbeat is way up there. But the more people train in simunitions, the more their heartbeat goes down. Why? Stress inoculation. That's what we want. Every once in a while you meet a trainer, and their heart is in the right place, but they'll

miss the concept. I had a supervisor tell me he was backing-off on simunitions training because his guys weren't getting excited anymore. But that's what we want! We want a police officer to walk into a gunfight with absolute calm and self-control, just like they were walking onto a range.

Conclusion

The age and stage of development matters in the interpreting of visually violent images. If younger than eight, youngsters should not see any sensational, gratuitous violence—ever. As children become verbally able to express ideas and analyze information, they can learn to understand, discuss, and appreciate “sensitive” portrayals of violence that can teach empathy and respect for life. But most kids can't reach that level of response when violence is portrayed as glamorous—the only normal reaction they can have is to think it's cool. But kids don't like to be seen as fools, either. They aren't naturally thinking through the violence-as-entertainment angle, but with a little encouragement from us, they may decide for themselves that screen violence is stupid, developed by adults to cater to the lowest common denominator and remove cash from wallets.

And if America has a police force that seems unable to constrain its violence, and a population that (having seen the videotape of Rodney King and the LAPD) has learned to fear its police forces, then the reason can be found in the entertainment industry. Look at the role models, look at the archetypes that police officers have grown up with. Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry became the archetype for a new generation of police officers who were not constrained by the law, a new breed of cop rewarded for placing vengeance above the law. Somewhere along the line we began to accept role models who “had” to go outside the law to kill criminals who we know “deserved to die,” then vicarious role models who killed in retribution for

adolescent social slights.

In war movies, westerns, and detective movies of the past, heroes only killed under authority of the law. If not, they were punished. In the end the villain was never rewarded for his violence, and he always received justice for his crimes. The message was simple: No man is above the law, crime does not pay, and for violence to be acceptable it must be guided by the constraints of the law.

There is a force within man that will cause men to rebel against killing, even at the risk of their own lives. But that force for life is balanced by a death force, and we have seen how pervasive and consistent has been the battle between these two forces throughout history. We have learned how to enable the death force, we must now learn how to put the psychological safety back on. Education and understanding are the first step. To fail to do this leaves us with only two possible results: to go the route of the Mongols and the Third Reich, or the route of Lebanon and Yugoslavia. No other result is possible if successive generations continue to grow up with greater and greater desensitization to the suffering of their fellow human beings. *We must put the safety catch back on our society.* ■

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman was an Airborne Ranger infantry officer and a psychology professor at West Point Military Academy. Since retirement, he has devoted himself to research, writing, and speaking on the topics of school violence, the effects of media mayhem on children, and how police can protect their moral and psychological discipline in a dangerous world. Colonel Grossman spoke at the Michigan State Police Training Academy on January 5, 2001. *With permission*, this article was compiled from excerpts of his seminar, and his books: *On Killing* and *Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill*. (See Colonel Grossman's website at www.killogy.com.)

UPCOMING “BULLETPROOF MIND” SEMINAR—June 6, 2001: The Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department and the Kalamazoo Law Enforcement Training Center will be hosting Lt. Col. Grossman at the Kalamazoo Valley Community College. **ALL police officers are invited to attend. The fee is \$35 per officer. To register, contact K.V.C.C. at (616) 373-7800.**

Bullies: Kids Who Love to Hate

In the recent school shooting in Santee, California, the suspect, 15-year-old Charles "Andy" Williams, appears to have been seeking revenge for being bullied. One fellow student commented about the suspect: "He got picked on a lot, because he was kind of quiet and wouldn't stand up for himself, so he was kind of asking for it."

In a documentary conducted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), an investigator interviewed a school bully and asked why they were so relentlessly and cruelly bullying a fellow classmate who was a shy, plain-looking girl, who did her best to keep to herself. The bully's response: "Because I hate her." "But why do you hate her?" asked the investigator. "Because, I just hate her," the bully replied matter-of-factly. Apparently, for some people, hate becomes its own motive. But where do they learn such hatred, at such a young age?

Bullying "Just because I hate you!" or "Because you're quiet!"—what is the source of such irrational acts and comments? Worse yet, recent studies show that the amount and extent of bullying is increasing, as revealed by researchers Charlene Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese in their book, *Cliques: 8 Steps to Help Your Child Survive the Social Jungle*.

There is good reason to believe that the bullying in schools today is more and meaner than it has been in living memory. CBC's Martin O'Malley and Amina Ali state: "Something about the bullying we hear about these days feels different. It's not always the mean big kid beating up the scared little kid. It's often six, seven kids beating up one scared little kid. Or extorting lunch money. Or stealing jackets. Or six, seven girls swarming and beating the girl who doesn't fit in."

"The excuses for bullying have one thing in common," state O'Malley and Ali, "They are all irrelevant. Each reason is a deceptive justification for the bully to indulge in a predictable pattern of violent (physical or psychological) behavior against another child who is smaller, younger or less strong—an easy target for the bully. The target is simply a useful object onto whom the bully can displace his or her anger

and aggression. In other words, if a child is picked on because they are allegedly 'fat,' then losing weight will make no difference; the bully simply invents another justification." There is always somebody vulnerable, on the bottom of the pecking order, who becomes the recipient for the pent up anger, fear, and hatred of others—sometimes, until they are pecked to death!



What causes bullying? For many years, psychologists have agreed that children (and adults) that exhibit unwarranted aggressiveness could have been conditioned to violence by being bullied or abused themselves, or having observed abusive behavior in the home (as in watching the father regularly abuse the mother). Human beings can also be conditioned to cruelty by being exposed to violence as entertainment.

People bully for ego reasons, to feel powerful, successful, to control someone else, and they get sadistic pleasure from the agony of others. Research by Dr. Roy Baumeister, author of *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*, revealed that bullies are often paranoid about the amount of respect they are afforded, and they use violence to build themselves up, or to punish others when they feel slighted. Victims of bullying also blame their "not being respected" for the reason they seek revenge. Thus the bully's brutality and hatefulness begets more of the same in their victims, in a tragic, vicious cycle.

According to Baumeister's research, the connection between all those who resort to acts of violence and cruelty, whether they be classified as bullies or

revenge seekers, is that they lack self-discipline and humility. In other words, it is their unstable egos and self-centeredness that allow them to rationalize acts of cruelty and violence. And it is a sad commentary on mass media that much of our so-called entertainment glorifies impulsiveness, self-indulgence, arrogance, and all the other sins that history and religion show to be the root of all evil. Indeed, "media mayhem" is the newest causal connection in cruelty and violence, and the most likely new "ingredient" in the toxic "cocktail" of variables that results in vicious bullying.

According to West Point psychology professor and Pulitzer nominated author of *On Killing* and *Stop Teaching Our Kids To Kill*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, one piece of the puzzle is that the media violence, inflicted when kids are very young, makes them very fearful. Bullying is a fear response. If you believe that people are going to hurt you, you hurt first. [Also] If you believe that the world is a cruel place, then you believe that cruelty is justified. Experiencing brutalization, first hand and through the media, in the first 6 years of life is the worst of it, the rest stacks on top of that.

The ultimate fear and horror in most modern lives is to be physically degraded. Death and debilitation by disease or accident are statistically far more likely to occur than death and debilitation by malicious action, but the statistics do not calm our basically irrational fears. It is not the fear of death and injury from disease or accident, but rather acts of personal degradation and domination by our fellow human beings that strike terror and loathing in our hearts. This is why bullying is so toxic, and why victims of bullying become so traumatized.

Most relevant to the study of bullying and revenge seeking is the fact that "psychological harm" (and anticipation of future harm) usually far exceeds the "physical injury" (or likelihood of future injury). Far more damaging is the impotence, shock, and horror in being so hated and despised as to be debased and abused by a fellow human being.

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Victims of continued abuse can become seriously depressed, and will feel like they are backed into a corner. Eventually, they will cry for help. Most victims of bullying make suicidal threats because they are too decent to hurt others. But occasionally, the victim of a bully will resort to the tactics of a bully, and make threats of violence. When they make these cries for help, their already fragile egos are being put on the line. They want somebody to help them. But when that doesn't happen, when somebody doesn't take their threat seriously, they feel compelled and obligated to carry out their threat—be it suicide or violence.

The "interpersonal" nature of bullying creates intense emotional anguish in the victim, says Grossman. And as "media inspired" acts of bullying have become more severe, the "media inspired" acts of retaliation by victims have also become more severe—one feeds on the other. The reason for this, according to Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist who learned about human nature by surviving the Nazi concentration camps, is that "an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation—is normal." In other words, "abnormal" acts of "interpersonal" hatred will inspire "abnormal" acts of revenge.

The tragic effects of media violence don't

stop when the child grows old enough to understand that TV is not reality. A particularly pathological new stage is reached when the child stops being frightened, and begins to associate pleasure with human death and suffering. Teachers across America tell how they can no longer use movies like "Schindlers List" and "Gettysburg" to teach their students about the tragedies of the past, because this new generation of children laugh, cheer and mock at depictions of human death and suffering.

Almost 200 years ago, the Irish statesman Edmund Burke said: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Because, "Doing nothing is giving them permission to proceed," as the U.S. Secret Service put it in a recent report on school shooters. Consider the Nazis—surely one of the most infamous group of bullies in the history of humankind. Early on, the other European countries repeatedly turned a blind eye to acts of aggression by the Nazis, in hopes that they would eventually be satisfied. But giving in to a bully only makes them want more, and despite all concessions, the Germans went to war anyway. Europe was lost, and it cost the free world dearly to take it back. If we allow bullies and bullying mentality to "invade" our

schools then our schools and our children may be lost, and it will cost us dearly, as parents and as a society, to take them back.

Ultimately, the goal of a healthy society should be to prevent the brutalization and traumatization of our children. Violent acts of physical abuse in the home is blatant child abuse, and so is violent visual media inflicted upon children at young ages. Perhaps, then, the biggest "bully" in America is the media. To stop bullying in our schools, we must stop the brutalization and traumatization of our children in the home, but also through violent television, movies and video games. A society that feeds violence to children, whether real or virtual, deserves what it gets: depressed children, fearful children, schoolyard bullies, and (in increasing numbers) hate filled rampage killers in our schools, our colleges and our workplaces. ■

Special thanks to Lt. Col. Dave Grossman for work on this article. For information and links on how to deal with bullying, check out the CBC site: cbc.ca/national/news/bully/. The CBC documentary on bullying is available at the Law Enforcement Resource Center by calling (517) 322-5624.

A.L.E.R.T. Driver Pursuit Training and 2002 Police Vehicle Test Evaluations

Attention Police-Driving Instructors! On May 30-June 1, 2001, the Michigan State Police Training Academy will host a seminar with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Association of Law Enforcement Emergency Response

Trainers (A.L.E.R.T.). The focus of this training is to address "legal" and "operational" vehicular pursuit training issues, including factors to consider when initiating, conducting and terminating a vehicular pursuit. The seminar is free and open to any police-driving instructor, but class size is limited, so register early.

This year the "2002 Model Year Police Vehicle Test Evaluation Program" will be Saturday, September

15th at Daimler Chrysler Proving Grounds (rain date: Sunday,

September 16th) and Monday, September 17th at Grattan Raceway (rain date: Tuesday, September 18th). Invitations will be mailed out in June to previously registered personnel. If anyone else has an interest or need to attend the test-runs, they should call for more information. (Note: The 2001 Police Vehicle Test results are available on the internet at www.msp.state.mi.us/msphone.htm. Click on "Publications," then double click on "MSP 2001 Police Vehicle Evaluation Report" and you will be taken directly to the report.)

To register for the A.L.E.R.T. seminar, or for more information on the 2002 Police Vehicle Test, call Betsy DeFeyter at (517) 322-1782. ■



THIS IS A FOOTBALL!

It's All About Fundamentals

It was over three years ago that the Los Angeles Police Department was embroiled in the Rampart Corruption Incident, in which Police Officers were identified as suspects in serious criminal activity. LAPD has historically proven itself to be one of the finest law enforcement agencies in the world, but the corruption still happened. Many police departments across the nation thought something like this would never happen to them, but have since learned that the Rampart Incident was a warning for all. In the Preface to the Executive Summary, the Board of Inquiry cited a statement made by Captain Ross Swope of the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C., during a 1996 Department of Justice Symposium on Police Integrity:

"The major cause in the lack of integrity in American police officers is mediocrity."

Captain Swope went on to explain that mediocrity stems from the failure to hold officers responsible and accountable. It comes from a lack of commitment, laziness, excessive tolerance and failure to develop and enforce the fundamentals. He felt that dealing with mediocrity is perhaps the greatest contemporary challenge to American law enforcement.

Swope would certainly find agreement from the late Vince Lombardi, the famed Green Bay Packers coach who reminded his superstar team during each spring training that it's all about fundamentals: "This is a football." Unfortunately, many police departments, in their hurry to modernize, have cheated the fundamentals in order to make time and money for the specialties. But this is like a football squad relying on the special teams to carry the game. Or in the science of Total Quality Management, it's the error of trying to achieve greatness without having a strong foundation from which to launch from.

We should thank LAPD for conducting an extensive and honest inquiry to find the causes of such corruption. We should also honor their forthrightness by heeding their recommendations. The Final Report of the Rampart Corrup-

tion Incident can be found by doing a search at LAPD's official web site, <http://www.lapdonline.org/>. Here are a few points:

- It is very clear that many of these officers allowed their personal integrity to erode and their activities certainly had a contagion effect on some of those around them. Assertions by one suspect officer that the pressure to produce arrests caused him to become corrupt, simply ignores the fact that he was convicted of stealing narcotics so he could sell them.
- Distrust, cynicism, fear of the police, and an erosion of community law and order are the inevitable result of a law enforcement agency whose ethics and integrity have become suspect.
- A breakdown in front-line supervision was certainly apparent in Rampart and it has also been identified as a key factor in corruption scandals in other cities. It is our sergeants, lieutenants and captains who have the daily and ongoing responsibility to ensure that the appropriate workplace standards are maintained.
- If we are to ensure that people follow the rules and comply with our standards, we must embark on an aggressive system of audits and inspections. The ultimate "audit" and the true measure of any law enforcement agency's effectiveness is the degree to which the community it serves is satisfied with its performance.
- It appears that the application of our hiring standards was compromised. Criminal records, inability to manage personal finances, histories of violent behavior and narcotics involvement are all factors that should preclude employment as police officers. The Department recommended the disqualification of several profiled officers for integrity issues, and in each case those recommendations were overruled by the Personnel Department.
- We need to review the way in which we assimilate new officers



into our organization during their critical first three years of employment. Specifically, we found an almost universal lack of understanding about the way in which a patrol officer's work flows through our systems and how the quality of that work effects everything else.

- Time and again, the Board found clear patterns of misconduct that went undetected. Regardless of the source, allegations were not taken seriously by some of the supervisors assigned to conduct the investigations. Equally significant was the failure of management to recognize those clear patterns and correct the behavior of the officers involved. Many of the complaints involved serious allegations that should have been handled by Internal Affairs Group rather than divisional supervisors.
- We simply must build a better Department infrastructure; one that will allow sufficient time for proactive supervision and sufficient management personnel to perform essential leadership and oversight functions. We also must change our "specialist" culture and recognize that our involvement toward Community Policing/Government can only take root when most community problems are dealt with through our Basic Cars, not by creating more specialized units.
- We must revitalize and reinforce our core values in the minds and hearts of all our personnel so that each and every employee understands their responsibility to uphold the integrity of the Department. ■